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Testimony to the Education Committee -- Comments on HB 5306

2/24/16, Erica Dean, Connecticut Association for Human Services

Good Morning Senator Slossberg, Representative Fleishmann and Respected Members of the Education Committee,

My name is Erica Dean; I am a policy analyst at the Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS). We are a statewide non-profit agency that actively works to reduce poverty and promote economic success through both policy and program work. Today I am commenting on the change in income federal guidelines for Care 4 Kids as well as to express concern about the ambiguous language for Child Quality Enhancements.

Care 4 Kids:

CAHS supports the proposed change according to Federal Guidelines in which families receiving Care 4 Kids continue to be eligible as their income increases up to 85% of the State Median Income (SMI). With this proposed change, parents who are both raising children and employed at low- to moderate- wage jobs will be less likely to run into roadblocks, particularly financial cliffs. This occurs when wage earners receive an income raise, which places them over the eligibility limits for childcare support. At the same time, the promotion is not enough to cover their loss of benefits, producing a net loss of income. By raising the cap to 85% of the SMI, which is still significantly below the annual cost needed for financial survival for a family of four¹, parents and caregivers will be able to continue working and feel secure during a critical time in child development^{2,3}.

Although Care 4 Kids will not be eliminated, we do recognize that this change will have cost implications that may impact future access to the program. More families will remain eligible for longer periods of time, while new families will continue to become eligible. With a finite amount of funding, it could become necessary to place new applicants on a waiting list (EXCEPT for those who are protected including TANF and potentially homeless families). The legislature should strive to prevent this from happening. Existing research suggests that childcare is an expense that can have devastating impacts on the ability of families, particularly female-headed households, to reach economic self-sufficiency. The inability to access reliable and affordable childcare is regularly cited as the primary

¹ Connecticut United Way. "ALICE: Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed: Connecticut", 2014.
http://alice.ctunitedway.org/files/2014/11/14UW-ALICE-Report_CT.pdf

² Lowe-Vandell, D., & Wolfe, B. "Child care quality: Does it matter and does it need to improve? Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin, 2000.

³ Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy. "Quality: What it is and why it matters in early childhood education", 2012.
http://www.scaany.org/documents/quality_earlyed_scaapolicybrief_sept2012.pdf

barrier to employment stability⁴. By failing to provide additional funding, we're preventing low-income individuals from being able to work. This negatively impacts opportunity for growth within our fragile state economy.

Childcare Quality Enhancements:

CAHS is concerned with the elimination of the five regional accreditation projects. All state funded programs in Connecticut are required to attain National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation. This process calls for on-going self-evaluation and hands-on training, which has been provided by these regional facilitation projects. Connecticut currently has a process that is very effective; we do not want to shift away from an approach that has made us 3rd in the country for number of NAEYC Accredited Programs⁵.

Secondly, there is a lack of clarity in the newly proposed language. While it is stated that these support programs will help childcare centers achieve accreditation, there is no clear explanation or plan for how it will happen. We are left without any indication regarding which programs will receive support and how it will be administered. As we strive to build a system of quality care for our youngest children, families and providers need clarity on the specific changes that will be made. It is necessary to ensure that we do not sacrifice the quality of support established through these accreditation projects that have been an integral part to our early childcare system.

⁴ The Woman's Fund of the Greater Cincinnati Foundation. "The Woman's Fund PULSE Briefing: Women, Poverty and Cliffs", 2012. https://gcfndn.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Pulse_Report_Cliff_Effect_2012.pdf

⁵ NAEYC Accreditation. Summary of Accredited Programs by State, 2016. http://oldweb.naeyc.org/academy/summary/center_summary.asp